United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/805
14 January 1991

MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General, returning to New York from Baghdad, says meeting with Saddam Hussein was "unsuccessful". To report to Security Council tonight about his mission to Iraq.

- Meeting convened by Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) in Geneva is presented plan of action for assistance to 1.5 million people leaving Iraq and Kuwait in case of outbreak of war.

- Seven countries pledge new contributions to Operation Salam, the United Nations emergency relief and rehabilitation programme for Afghanistan.

* * *

Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar returned to New York today, after talks on Sunday with President Saddam Hussein of Iraq concerning the Persian Gulf crisis, and characterized those talks as "polite but, unfortunately, unsuccessful". He is to report to the Security Council in consultations at 9 p.m. on the results of his peace mission.

The Secretary-General had gone to Baghdad in an effort to find a peaceful solution to the Persian Gulf crisis. The 15 January deadline set by the Security Council for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait expires at midnight tomorrow.

The Secretary-General told the press upon his arrival at Kennedy Airport today that he had not been offered anything from the Iraqi authorities which could be considered as a step towards peace. When asked if there was any hope left for peace, he said it was "a little late for embarking on any other efforts". Asked if he had lost hope, the Secretary-General replied, "In some ways, yes". He also said that President Hussein had not expressed any desire to withdraw from Kuwait, nor had the question of an international conference on the Palestinian question been specifically raised during the talks.

In Baghdad yesterday, 13 January, the Secretary-General held talks for three and a half hours with President Hussein and, before that and later, with Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz and other senior Iraqi officials.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

During his four-day trip, the Secretary-General held talks, on the Persian Gulf situation, with President François Mitterrand of France, on two occasions; Foreign Minister Rene Felber of Switzerland; the 12 Foreign Ministers of the European Economic Community (EEC), led by Foreign Minister Jacques Poos of Luxembourg; Foreign Minister Budimir Loncar of Yugoslavia, Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement; King Hassan of Jordan and senior Jordanian officials; former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

A United Nations official told correspondents today that upon his return to New York, the Secretary-General had immediately consulted with the President of the Security Council, who called for consultations this evening at 9 to hear the Secretary-General's report on his peace mission to Iraq.

The Secretary-General also spoke, by telephone, today with British Prime Minister John Major; with Foreign Minister Poos of Luxembourg; and with the Permanent Representatives of the United States and the Soviet Union.

* * *

A United Nations plan of action to take care of some 1.5 million people who are expected to leave Iraq and Kuwait in case of the outbreak of war was presented last Friday in Geneva at a meeting convened by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO).

Present at the meeting were the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Humanitarian Assistance relating to the crisis between Iraq and Kuwait, Saddrudin Aga Khan; more than 70 Governments; United Nations organizations and agencies; intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The United States representative pledged $3 million for the planned activities.

The UNDRO said in a press release that it was impossible yet to predict which border points would be the safest route of escape or to know in advance the breakdown, by nationalities, of the displaced population. Therefore, a module for the four concerned countries -- Iran, Jordan, Syria and Turkey -- had been included in the contingency planning, to allow for the pre-positioning of relief supplies and to meet emergency requirements, in line with contingency measures taken by local authorities.

Speaking at the meeting, UNDRO Co-ordinator M'hamed Essaafi said the major concern of the neighbouring countries was to be sure they would receive immediate assistance from the international community so that they would not have to shoulder the burden alone when facing a sudden influx of people, were it displaced persons or refugees. "The example of Jordan, to whom the international community still owes about $40 million, was not an encouraging one", he added. Mr. Essaafi said $38 million, representing 25 per cent of the total amount required to assist 400,000 persons over a period of three months, were urgently needed. "We all wish that war can be avoided, but we must at the same time be ready to face the worst."

(more)

Saddrudin Aga Khan emphasized that the plan was a perfect example of inter-agency co-ordination and that co-operation of all agencies concerned to produce this update to the plan had been carried out in an exemplary fashion. He expressed concern about how little attention had been paid to the humanitarian consequences of the political conflict.

D. Stafford, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, noted that 60 per cent of those who might leave Iraq and Kuwait would be refugees, that 12 officers of the agency had already left for the region and that an operations and communications centre had been set up at UNHCR headquarters. Seventeen flights, commissioned by the agency for three days starting from today, would position in the region basic shelter and relief supplies, to meet the needs of the first 50,000 persons.

Representatives of the affected and transit countries -- Bangladesh, Iran, Jordan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Syria and Viet Nam -- expressed their appreciation for the timely updating of the plan of action, emphasizing the need for a rapid and substantial contribution to cope with any further deterioration of the situation in the region.

* * *

Seven countries -- the United States, Canada, Sweden, Australia, Finland, Germany and Italy -- have announced new contributions to Operation Salam, a programme of emergency relief and rehabilitation in Afghanistan being implemented throughout that country by United Nations agencies, volunteers and local and international non-governmental organizations.

These new contributions come at a time when the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations are engaged in efforts to help the Afghan people cope with the ongoing conflict and the devastation caused during the past decade. In addition, difficulties are now arising now from the exceptionally severe winter, particularly in the north of the country. Urgent efforts are being made to deliver essential food supplies and other relief goods to the affected areas.

United Nations assistance programmes of Operation Salam, which began in May 1988, cover rehabilitation of agriculture, food aid, health care, education and training, and mine clearance, among other things.

* *** *